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AUTHOR Thomas, Paul F.
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ABSTRACT

The most striking feature of the Japanese social studies curriculum at the elementary level is its role as the instructor of Japanese national values and attitudes. The social studies curriculum has gone through four major revisions since World War II. In the most recent revision, in the early 1980's, the focus has been on instituting new teaching strategies similar to those emphasized in American schools in the 1960's: experiential learning, individualized instruction, and pupil-centered approaches. The principal themes for elementary social studies in Japan are: community, family, work ethic, the interrelationship of society and nature, community cooperation, economic development, and national cultural and social heritage. (LP)

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SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE JAPANESE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by
Paul F. Thomas

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Social Studies In the Japanese Elementary School

Paul F. Thomas

The structure of Japanese schooling is not too different from that of North America. This fact is not surprising if you recall that following the surrender ending World War II, Japan, under its American proconsul, General Douglas MacArthur, adopted many of the features of American education. One of the common features is the division of schooling into elementary (Grades 1 to 6), lower secondary (Grades 7 to 9), and upper secondary (Grades 10 to 12).

In Japan, schooling is compulsory to the end of Grade 9.

Each division is normally accommodated in a separate school building with architecture and facilities that, except for one characteristic, replicate very closely those of our own schools. The one exceptional characteristic is the lavishness of the Japanese facilities and equipment. Education, as a social instrument for developing human capital, has top priority in Japan; it is funded directly out of national resources. In good times—and times are currently good for the Japanese—this approach avoids the petty jurisdictional squabbles over educational policy and finance that are endemic to the North American scene. Curriculum development is also centralized: curricular guidelines for Grades 1 to 12, standards of curriculum organization, and objectives and content for each subject and grade are made available by the national Ministry of Education in Tokyo, in accordance with the regulations of the school-education law. The principles laid out by the ministry are then fleshed out at the school level and submitted for the approval of the local prefectural board of education. In the classroom, teachers are not required to follow the order of topics as given, as long as the objectives are reached.

Social Studies

The Japanese social studies curriculum has gone through four stages of revision reflecting socio-economic developments at the following points in post-war history:

- The immediate post-war period, associated with the need for reconstruction of the national economy.
- The 1950s and the fine tuning of national purpose.
- The 1960s with its global social upheavals.
- The early 1980s with their prospect of a post-industrial informational society.

In the latest revision, the curriculum has been "softened." The number of hours devoted to social studies has been reduced (as with mathematics and science) to permit more time for extra-curricular activities (now carried on in the schools from 14:00 to 16:00, daily) and the pursuit of life-and-leisure skills such as art, music, cooking, sewing, and communications skills. In that respect, Japan is moving toward the liberal attitudes that we held in the late 1960s—while our own pendulum is swinging the opposite way, toward tougher courses and standards. Japan's social studies methodology is also moving toward practices that we discovered in the 1960s: problem-solving approaches building on pupil experience, using the classroom as a microcosm of society, individualized research, and other pupil-centred approaches.

A particularly interesting development is the integration of social studies with moral education and special activities (see "Moral Education in the Schools of Japan," *Horizon*, volume 23, number 1, pages 17-20).

The principal themes for social studies, Grades 1 to 6, are as follows:

Grade	Themes
1	The services and work functions in the community that support the daily life of the pupil.
	Family change. The seasons.
2	People must work to live. Pupils are to observe people at work and to record their observations.
3	The character of daily life reflects dependence on the natural environment. Variations occur in space (from region to region) and in time.
4	The community develops through co-operation: among people, between people and nature.

5 Economic activity: agriculture and industry. Environmental conservation and resource utilization.

6 The Japanese historical/cultural heritage. Political system of Japan. Place of Japan in the world.

These themes are amplified below.

Summary Outline of the Japanese Social Studies Curriculum—Grades 1 to 6

Note: The following summary is compiled from my re-translation of documents provided courtesy of the Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, Tokyo, Japan. Re-translation was necessitated by the very rough character of the original English translation.

Translation difficulties stem from a fundamental incompatibility of Japanese and English syntax; Japanese adjectives and nouns often translate to English nouns and prepositions, respectively. For example, the English sentence, "The girl is sitting under the tree," is rendered in Japanese syntax as, "At the tree's under, girl—the sitting is." Moreover, Japanese verb forms do not change, but the adjectives undergo all manner of declensional convolutions. The effect is to convey a greater range of feeling tones in both utterance and the written word than is possible in English. I attempted, albeit imperfectly, to preserve some of the original flavor, wherever language that seems archaic to us is used.

Master Objective for Grades 1 to 6
To help pupils acquire a basic understanding of social life, an affection for the land and history of our nation, and a fundamental awareness of the responsibility of citizenship in a democratic and peaceful nation and society.

Objectives and Content for Each Grade
Grade 1
Objectives

1. To take notice of the various work functions of society and the facilities that provide support for daily life; to cultivate in pupils an awareness of what is involved in being members of society.

2. To have pupils actually observe the social phenomena they experience in their daily life, and express effectively the results of such observation.

Content

1. To observe and understand the working environment of teachers and others who provide support for school life.

2. To understand that the equipment and facilities of the school and parks are owned jointly by the people.

3. To recognize the location of the schools and the various routes for reaching school; to become aware of the purpose and functions of traffic-safety facilities and to appreciate the work of people who maintain pupil safety.

4. To observe and understand the work performed by the various members of the family; to become aware of the importance of water, electricity, gas and other utilities used in daily life.

5. To note and understand the changes occurring in the conditions of family life as one grows up, and the various ways in which people adapt to the seasonal changes of the year.

Grade 2
Objectives

1. To have pupils recognize that those who are engaged at their jobs as an occupation make efforts in these jobs because they are necessary for their livelihood.

2. To have pupils actually observe jobs that people have as occupations, and effectively express the results of such observation in both oral and recorded form.

Content

1. To classify the various occupations that are encountered in daily life. Also, to note the various devices that retail-store owners use to facilitate purchasing by customers.

2. To note and understand that those workers engaged in agricultural production or the fishing industry make efforts to harmoniously adapt to natural conditions to prevent or avoid disasters.

3. To note and understand that factory workers share their work so as to co-operate in processing raw materials and produce manufactured goods.

4. To note and understand that workers engaged in the transportation services endeavor to maintain the safety

and well-being of passengers in addition to keeping precise arrival and departure schedules.

5. To note and understand that postal workers strive to have the mail delivered quickly and accurately.

Grade 3
Objectives

1. To make pupils understand that the life of the people in a region is closely related to the natural environment, that there are regional variations in production activities and consumer life, and that the conditions of life have also changed historically over time, to help pupils develop an awareness of what is entailed in being members of the community.

2. To have pupils observe social phenomena in the community, and to effectively use maps and other concrete learning materials.

Content

1. To understand—by studying its unique topography, the land-utilization and distribution of communities in the region around their home city, town, or village—the relationship between the life of the people and their natural environment. To recognize the geographical position of their own city, town, or village within the prefecture; and to note the topographic characteristics of their home-prefecture.

2. To understand the important productive activities of their home city, town, or village in terms of—the relationship with the natural environment, utilization of resources and raw materials, and the transportation and sale of products, and to think about the relations of their home city, town, or village with other regions through the exchange of production and activities.

3. To understand the functions of the business district within the home city, town, or village; the sales devices used; modes of co-operation; customers' requirements; and traffic conditions. To reflect upon the relations of the home city, town, or village with other regions, from the consumer view.

4. To understand—by selecting a region in the local prefecture possessing different natural conditions from the home city, town, or village—the conditions of life in that region, and to reflect upon the unique characteristics of their home city, town, or village.

5. To understand, through concrete examples, the ways in which the life of the local city, town, or village has changed, and to have an interest in the cultural treasures and events in the community.

Special considerations in teaching lower division (Grades 1-3)

In Grades 1 to 3, pupil interest should be especially directed toward understanding social life, particularly as it is manifested in the school and family. Concrete observations are to be made and recorded concerning the various jobs that are performed by individuals in the home and social environment.

Learning conditions should enable pupils to express themselves effectively by cultivating the foundations for deepening their understanding about social life. Special attention in teaching should be paid to such related and various activities as language, nature, plastic arts, and so forth.

Grade 4
Objectives

1. To have pupils understand that co-operative and planned activities, designed to promote the safety and betterment of human life, are being carried out in the community; that such efforts were made by their predecessors in the past, and to develop a pupil attitude that seeks to enhance the development of the community.

2. To have pupils understand that various peoples make their living by adapting themselves to the natural environment; to consider the regions of the nation having distinctive features in terms of the natural conditions; and to help pupils think about the life of the community from a broad perspective.

3. To have pupils actually observe the social phenomena in the community and to help pupils make effective use of concrete learning materials with due regard for their characteristics.

Content

1. To understand that in order to maintain the safety, health, and wellbeing of people, co-operative systems within the community and between the regional communities are necessary.

a. To understand that the measures and works for obtaining and providing drinking water, irrigation water, electricity, and gas, as well as the disposition of waste

materials, are carried out with full consideration of the needs of the people, and that the facilities related to these works contribute to the welfare of the people living in a wide area.

b. To understand that in order to ensure the safety of the community against such disasters as fires, storms, and floods, the agencies concerned take protective measures by keeping close contact among themselves, and that these agencies take action immediately when disaster strikes.

2. To understand that in order to improve community life, work is being carried out in a planned way by the city, town, or village or at the prefectural level, and to understand and to appreciate the work done by their predecessors in developing the region.

a. To note and understand the systematic efforts that are being made by the city, town, or village or the prefecture, by examining the processes for establishing public facilities such as citizens' public halls and parks in the region, and to reflect upon the relationship between these public facilities and the life of the community.

b. By examining concrete examples of regional development, as well as the preservation work carried out by earlier planners, to understand and appreciate the efforts made by one's predecessors on behalf of the community in days past. To examine the skills they used as well as the environmental situation at the time.

3. By examining the different regions of the country from a climatic and topographic standpoint, to understand the conditions of daily life, and to inculcate interest in the way in which members of the community earn a living in various regions as they adapt themselves to the natural environment.

Grade 5

Objectives

1. To understand the characteristics of food preparation, manufacturing, and industrial output in our nation, and the relationship between these productive activities and national life.

2. To understand natural land features and those made by people, as aspects of the geographic environment, and to deepen pupil interest in the preservation of the environment and the effective use of resources.

3. To have pupils make effective use of the basic learning materials pertaining to the natural environment and social phenomena.

Content

1. To comprehend the present state of national development in agriculture and fisheries; to realize that the people who are engaged in these industries are devising ways to increase production, and to reflect upon the significance of food production which supports the nutritional life of the nation.

a. To know the main agricultural products, their regional distribution and relationship to land use; to understand through concrete regional examples, current efforts in technical innovation and managerial improvement that fully utilize natural conditions; to appreciate the importance of agricultural production for ensuring the food for the nation.

b. To examine the characteristics of various fishing areas and to understand, through concrete examples in fishery regions, the efforts being made to preserve fishing grounds and to improve fishing techniques; to appreciate the importance of the conservation and development of fishing resources for the dietary life of the nation.

2. To know about the manufacturing industry of our nation, to understand that those who are engaged in the manufacturing industry are devising ways to increase production while seeking effective use of resources, and to reflect upon the significance of the industrial basis of national life.

a. To understand the patterns of regional distribution in the nation's manufacturing industry. In addition, to understand, through concrete examples in industrially active regions, that the given conditions of land and transportation are being utilized for technological development. The effective use and storing of resources is just as important as industrial output to the life of the nation. Moreover, such is very important for protecting the health and living environment of people from various public nuisances.

b. To understand that industrial production evolves by making use of new materials and better adaptations to environmental conditions even in the face of traditional technology, and to reflect upon the significance of the skills and products of industrial workers.

3. To examine, using maps and other materials, the pattern of land forms, climate, distribution of resources,

and the pattern and characteristics of transportation networks; to understand that these are closely related to land use within the country and its population distribution, and susceptable to natural disasters; thus deepening pupil appreciation of the physical side of geographic environment.

Special considerations in teaching Grades 4 and 5
For Grades 4 and 5, part (3) of the content should never pupils should deal with effects before causes, that is, what before why. As environmental factors are explanatory, they should be considered after the what of social and economic activity.) This approach also makes it easier to integrate the learning acquired in the lower grades.

Grade 6
Objectives

1. To understand and appreciate more deeply the achievements of our predecessors who contributed to the development of national life and our cultural heritage; to cultivate an attitude of valuing the history and traditions of our nation.

2. To understand the functions of our political system, so important for the stability and betterment of the people's life at the present; to note the role of our nation in international society, and the contributions of the Japanese people to the world at large.

3. To foster effective pupil use of basic learning materials on the history of our nation and the life of its people.

Content

1. To note the existence and nature of historical remains and other cultural properties in the regions neighboring the local area and throughout the country; to appreciate the historical background of our life.

2. To note the outline of one thousand and several hundred years of history prior to the modern period marked by the unification of Japan by the *Yamato* Dynasty. Pre-modern history can be divided, according to the location of the central government, into the *Asuka, Nara, Heian, Kamakura, Muromachi, Edo,* etc., periods; it is also possible to divide our history into various periods according to the prevailing social conditions. At the same time, it is also possible to understand the major historical phenomena by focussing attention upon the work of individuals and representative cultural heritages.

a. To understand the life of the people at the historical onset of fishing and farming cultures and the manner in which the Japanese peoples were united; and to appreciate the mythologies and legends which attempted to explain the origins of the Japanese people.

b. To understand, by examining the individual historical achievements and cultural heritages, the absorption of Asian continental culture, the establishment of strong governmental organization by the reforms of *Taika*, and the political and cultural life to be found in the capitals of *Nara* and *Heian*.

c. To understand—by examining the work of individuals and cultural heritages—the circumstances by which warriors came to exert influence as through the battles between the *Genji* and *Heike* families, the administration of the *Kamakura* Shogunate, and the battles against Yuan's invasion; the arrival of firearms and Christianity, and the national unification by *Oda* and *Toyotomi*.

d. To understand, by examining the works of individuals and cultural heritages, the establishment of the *Edo* Shogunate, the policy of national seclusion, the rise of learning and culture, political reforms, and the development of industry and transportation.

e. To understand, by examining the work of individuals who made contributions to the modernization of our nation, that since the inception of the nation, its national power has increased steadily through the various reforms of the *Meiji* Restoration, namely the abolition of clans, the establishment of prefectures and greater equalization in social opportunity; the opening of the Diet, the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars and the amending of one-sided treaties; and emergence of Japan as a democratic nation after the First and Second World Wars.

3. To understand in a concrete way that our national democracy is based upon the fundamental concepts embodied in the constitution, and to realize the importance of co-operating with the other nations of the world, if we as Japanese value peace.

a. To note and understand the effects of politics upon the daily life of the people, and that the function of politics is to maintain and enhance the standards of the national life.

b. To understand the meaning of popular sovereignty, as parliamentary government by freely elected representatives chosen by the people at large; that such

important matters as the ideals of the nation, the position of the Emperor, the rights and duties of the people are stipulated in the constitution and are therefore the foundation of the nation and the life of the people.

c. To understand, by examining concrete examples, that our nation is linked closely with other countries of the world through trade; to confirm, by using a globe, the location of the major countries of the globe, that in order to seek co-operation with other countries a sound international understanding is essential.

d. To note and understand the workings of the United Nations in its efforts to establish a peaceful international society and the important role that our nation is playing in the world.

Special considerations in teaching Grade 6

1. In dealing with the historical survey of pre-modern Japan indicated in item 2 of the content above, teachers should not treat those historical highlights exhaustively. It is preferable to carefully reflect a *few* instances of historical individuals and cultural heritage developments that can be dealt with most concretely and vividly, so as to maximize impact on the pupils' interests and concerns.

2. With regard to 3 of the contents above, the teaching should be focussed around concrete examples found in the life of the people that are easily understood by the pupils. In this case, it is necessary to consider, with the rights and duties of the people indicated under b, such items as suffrage and the duty to pay taxes.

3. With regard to 3 c and d, teachers should refrain from giving too much conceptual and abstract instruction. Consideration should be given to developing in the pupils an interest in the national flag of our nation and those of other countries, as well as an attitude of respect for them.

SUMMARY

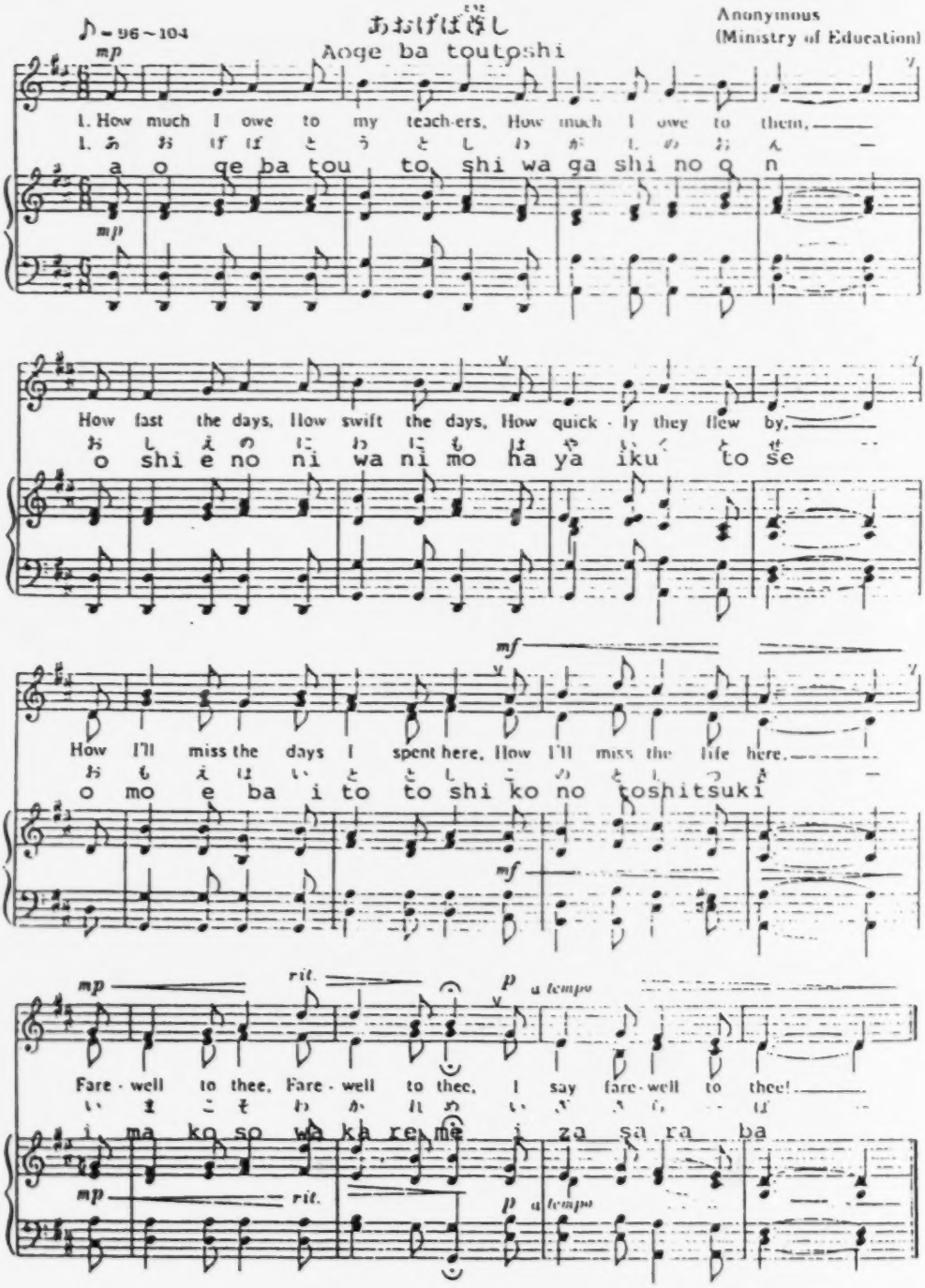
To me, the most striking aspect of the Japanese social studies curriculum is the utter congruency with, and support for, the Japanese national purpose. The perquisite values and attitudes are instilled into the Japanese from Grade 1. These include: an appreciation of teachers that is *formally* inculcated (see the musical panegyric dedicated to the teacher, elsewhere in this issue of *Horizon*); an emphasis on the need to work hard, to co-operate with others; to value nature, other peoples, other nations, and peace (Japan's freedom of the seas depends on these latter attitudes).

Similar values are to be found in our own social studies curricula, but those of the Japanese are more explicit and coherent. And if the current achievement of the Japanese people on the social, economic, and cultural fronts are any indication, the Japanese social studies objectives are eminently attainable in daily life.

Why can't we do likewise?

How Much I Owe to My Teachers

—Courtesy Japanese Ministry of Education

Editor's note: This song is sent from the central Japanese curriculum department in Tokyo to every elementary school in the nation. It betokens the high esteem which is systematically accorded to the teaching profession in Japanese society. What would be required for this situation to prevail in Canada and B.C.?

♪ = 96 ~ 104
おおげばぎし
Aoge ba toutoshi
Anonymous
(Ministry of Education)
mp
1. How much I owe to my teach-ers, How much I owe to them,
1. あ お げ ば と う と し わ が し の お ん
a o ge ba tou to shi wa ga shi no o n
How fast the days, How swift the days, How quick-ly they flew by,
お し え の に わ に も は や い く と せ
o shi e no ni wa ni mo ha ya iku to se
mf
How I'll miss the days I spent here, How I'll miss the life here,
お も え ば い と と し こ の と い つ き
o mo e ba i to to shi ko no toshitsuki
mf
mp
rit.
p
a tempo
Fare-well to thee, Fare-well to thee, I say fare-well to thee!
い と こ わ か れ の い ま そ わ か れ め い ざ さ ら ば
i ma so wa ka re me i za sa ra ba
mp
rit.
p
a tempo

How Much I Owe To My Teachers

1 How much I owe to my teachers.
How much I owe to them,
How fast the days,
How swift the days,
How quickly they flew by,
How I'll miss the days I spent here,
How I'll miss the life here,
Farewell to thee,
Farewell to thee,
I say farewell to thee!

2 How much I owe to my playmates,
How much I owe to them,
Forget-me-not,
Forget-me-not,
How I miss them always,
Be ambitious and kind always,
Don't forget thy smile,
Farewell to thee,
Farewell to thee,
I say farewell to thee!

3 How I shall miss my old schoolrooms,
How I love them so much,
Oh, the light gained
From fireflies
And white snow that lay deep,
How I'll miss the days I spent here,
How quickly they flew by,
Farewell to thee,
Farewell to thee,
I say farewell to thee!

あおげば尊し

一
あおげば　とうとし　わが師の恩
教の庭にも　はや　いくとせ
おもえば　いと疾し　このとし月
今こそ　わかれめ　いざさらば

二
互にむつみし　日ごろの思
わかるる後にも　やよ　わするな
身をたて　名をあげ　やよ　はげめよ
いまこそ　わかれめ　いざさらば

三
朝ゆう　なれにし　まなびの窓
ほたるのともし火　つむ白雪
わするる　まぞなき　ゆくとし月
今こそ　わかれめ　いざさらば